Digitalisation drive in S'pore gets $174m research boost

New initiatives aim to develop tech solutions, speed up commercialisation of research

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In the future, how cyclists and motorists react to one another on the road could be analysed with data from cameras and sensors to help develop transport policies.

Using secure wireless networks, the movements of Covid-19 patients in hospitals could also be better tracked.

These are some of the projects announced under two new research initiatives worth $174 million over five years that could further propel Singapore's digitalisation drive.

One involves a research laboratory by United States technology company Cisco and the National University of Singapore (NUS), with an investment of $54 million.

The other initiative links up tech, defence and engineering company ST Engineering with four partners and has a $120 million investment.

Speaking at the launch of the Cisco-NUS lab yesterday, Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong said: "Partnerships between companies continue to be an effective way to spur innovation and reimagine new business models."

The new Accelerated Digital Economy Corporate Laboratory will boost research into artificial intelligence, healthcare, cyber security, urban infrastructure and workplace productivity.

Supported by the National Research Foundation, it aims to develop 17 tech solutions as well as 12 products and services.

Mr Gan said these cutting-edge technologies can be accessed by companies looking to digitally transform their businesses.

This is in line with Singapore's $25 billion Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2025 Plan, he said. The lab – in NUS' Kent Ridge campus – will create more than 20 research and development jobs, as well as training opportunities for almost 100 researchers, analysts, engineers and students.

It is expected to partner at least 100 Singapore-based companies to customise and refine solutions according to their requirements.

In healthcare, the lab is working with Singapore General Hospital to look into collecting and analysing the data of patients over secure wireless networks.

This could, for instance, be used to monitor Covid-19 patients in the emergency department with radio-frequency identification tags. If they enter areas they are not supposed to, healthcare workers can quickly locate them and see who they came into close contact with.

For urban infrastructure, the lab aims to simulate and analyse road traffic. Besides making sense of road users' interactions, data processed by network devices installed at lamp posts could also help researchers understand how cyclists and pedestrians behave towards one another on pavements.

On Oct 28, ST Engineering announced that it is working with NUS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore University of Technology and Design, and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research to speed up the commercialisation of tech research via industry applications.

Dubbed Research Translation @ ST Engineering, the initiative will look into areas such as smart traffic management, 5G mobile, energy tech and cyber security. The partnership will involve up to 100 researchers and about 200 ST Engineering scientists and engineers.

The outcomes of the research will be adopted by ST Engineering for its commercial and defence businesses in the aerospace, smart city and public security areas.

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Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong at the launch of the Accelerated Digital Economy Corporate Laboratory yesterday, flanked by Cisco's managing director for Singapore and Brunei Andy Lee (left), and National University of Singapore president Tan Eng Chye.
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